

Madam Speaker, I rise today as cosponsor of H.R. 3644, the Bay-Watershed Education and Training Regional Programs and National Environmental Literacy Grant Program, and with great appreciation for my colleague from California, who combines her interest--our interest--in environmental protection with our interest in the education of youth. And I would like to talk about the bill at hand. She combines here book learning with field environmental education. Environmentalist David Polis once said, "Must we always teach our children with books? Let them look at the mountains and the stars up above. Let them look at the beauty of the waters and the trees and flowers on earth. They will then begin to think, and to think is the beginning of a real education."

If we want to teach our children to be responsible stewards of our environment, we must foster understanding and awareness of the environment as an integral part of our educational curricula. The B-WET and National Environmental Literacy Grant Program operated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is an excellent example of a successful environmental program.

Now the opponents of this legislation seem to think that because the National Research Council says there are other good educational programs in NOAA in addition to this, that we somehow should not do this. Through these grant programs, elementary students and high school students across the Nation have learned to appreciate the importance of healthy coastal and ocean resources to the quality of our life and to coastal-based economies.

The legislation before us today would fully authorize and expand access to the B-WET and the Environmental Literacy Program. I'd like to thank my colleague from California for including a provision in this legislation that would allow the Mid-Atlantic region to be a priority area for future B-WET programs. This will allow successful New Jersey educational programs like Rutgers University and the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve to compete for funds that can enrich environmental education throughout the State and the region. New Jersey is already taking the lead on coastal and marine resources through the K-12 education program developed by the National Estuarine Research Reserve System. It's known as KEEP, the K-12 Estuarine Education Program. The availability of B-WET funds to the Mid-Atlantic region could help to advance KEEP, a field-based estuarine science education initiative that features real-time data and innovative technology. Research has shown that environmental education, particularly field-based education like this, fosters students' readiness to learn. It improves scores on standardized tests. Yes, it helps book learning, too. And it stimulates student interest in math and science.

I urge my colleagues to support this authorization, and I thank the gentlelady from California for her leadership on this.